

The Alternative

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Harry sighed and rolled over. Another summer with the Dursleys stretched ahead of him. He didn't even want to think of what might happen this summer. It was late; he needed to sleep. Slowly, his eyes closed and he drifted into a restless sleep.

"Harry," a voice called through his sleep. "Wake up, sleepyhead." Harry frowned in his sleep. It sure didn't sound like Aunt Petunia. He opened his eyes. Someone was at the window. The person pulled up the blinds and sun flooded in. Harry blinked. He looked at the woman standing in a pool of sunshine.

"Mom?" he whispered, incredulous.

"Who'd you expect, silly?" she said teasingly. "Hurry and come downstairs. Breakfast's nearly ready." Harry nodded. As she left, he looked around.

This was not his room. This room was full of moving pictures, and wizard things. Hedwig was sitting in her cage, reassuringly familiar. His Firebolt leaned against one wall. Everything else, though, was strange. He got up and went into the bathroom, where he had another shock. His scar was gone! The lightning bolt that had marked him since the day his parents died—but it looked as if they hadn't died. He shook his head. "This is all a dream," he said to himself. "A really weird dream. It must be." But it was far too vivid a dream. He pinched himself sharply. Maybe, he thought for an instant, the other was the dream—but he remembered too vividly his life to think it was a dream. No, this must be some odd magical spell. He wondered what to do.

He couldn't think of anything, so he dressed and went downstairs. His mother was cooking breakfast; his father, reading the papers. James looked up as his son came in.

"So there you are. We were beginning to wonder whether you'd ever get here." Harry sat down and his mother gave him a plate. He ate for a while.

"Is something the matter?" his mother asked.

"What? Oh, no."

"You just don't seem your normal self today. Are you feeling all right?" Harry was about to answer when the door in the kitchen opened.

"Prongs old boy, what's going on around here? And Lily, I see you're fixing breakfast, ahh, thank you. You are as gracious as you are lovely."

"Sirius, you old flatterer, you never will learn, will you?"

"And how's my godson today?" Harry looked at Sirius Black. This was not the fugitive Black had been when Harry had last seen him. No, this was the man who had laughed at Harry's parents wedding. Something very strange was going on. Suddenly, Harry realized his mother had spoken to him.

"Sorry, I didn't hear that."

"I asked what time your friend Ron is getting here."

"Oh. Umm, I can't remember."

"Let me see if I wrote it down." Lily waved her wand and a notebook appeared in her hand. She leafed through it.

"Here we are, eleven o'clock."

****Maybe Ron would know what was going on**, Harry thought. Or maybe Ron had changed too.**

As soon as Ron arrived, Harry took him up to his room. He shut the door and turned to face him.

"Ron, has anything strange happened to you today?" Ron looked at him.

"Well, yeahâ€¦Actually, I think there's something strange going on."

"I'd say that's an understatement."

"Harry, I don't understand it! My family's about like normal â€" Fred and George blew up stuff this morning, you know, typical things â€" but, Harry, your family, your scarâ€¦".

"I know. Something very strange has happened. And I just hope it doesn't have anything to do with Voldemort." Ron shivered.

"Why do you think it's him? And **please**, say You-Know-Who."

"I don't know, I just have a funny feeling. Tell you what, I'm going to call Hermione." The boys went to use the telephone. Harry could hear his parents and Sirius laughing together from the next room. A funny feeling went through him. **Why am I so concerned?** He asked himself. **My parents are alive! I should be jumping up and down for joy.** Ron turned to him.

"Umm, Harry, would you mind using the felly â€" telephone? I'm not quite sure about it."

"Yeah. Let's see, Hermione gave me the number yesterday." He dialed. The phone rang, and Hermione answered.

"Hello?"

"Hermione, we need to talk to you. It's about some weird stuff-"

"Who is this?"

"It's us, Hermione! Harry and Ron!"

"I don't know anyone by that name. Go away." And she slammed down the phone. The boys stared at each other.

"There is definitely something weird going on," said Ron, his voice a little unsteady. They headed back upstairs.

"What could it be? I've never even heard of anything like this before," Ron said.

"Look, it looks like everything but us is messed up, right?"

"Yeah."

"So it has to be some weird kind of spell." Harry shivered. "Remember that prophecy Professor Trelawny had? About Vol-sorry, You-Know-Who, coming back? Maybe he has something to do with this."

"I'll see if I can find anything out in Percy's old books, he's got dozens," Ron said. "Look, we have a telephone, give me a call?"

"All right."

But it was Ron who called Harry, a few days later. "I'll be over in twenty minutes." He sounded excited. When he came in, he was carrying a big book.

"Look, I think that this is the problem, and if we do this spell, everything will go back to normal."

"I'm not sure I want it to." Harry said quietly.

"What?"

"Ron, look. I have my parents with me for the first time in my life!

This life is a whole lot better than the one I left. And I'm not famous, people don't follow me staring at my scar, because I haven't got one. This is what I've always dreamed of."

"You haven't read any history books or papers or anything in the last few days, have you?" Ron asked in a weird voice.

"No, I've been talking to my parents, and-

"That isn't the point," Ron broke in. "I did some research-

"You?"

"Well, Hermione isn't here, so someone had to. Anyway, your family wasn't attacked. But You-Know-Who wasn't defeated then, either. There was a big battle a few years later, and hundreds of wizards on both sides died! We're still picking up the pieces. Dumbledore's dead, Lupin's dead—And Lucius Malfoy is Minister of Magic."

"What?"

"You heard me. Know why Hermione didn't know us? Because a law was passed eight years ago that forbade the magical education of Muggle-borns. My dad and yours fought it, but they lost. And there are no Muggle protection laws. If they find out about us, they're killed, not memory-wiped. This world is in pieces! You may have a decent life, but most people don't. The Muggles think that there was a 'nuclear war', that's how we covered up for our spells. But it's a mess. And you want to be selfish and let millions of people suffer because you want to be with your parents." Ron dropped the book on Harry's bed and walked to the door. "Fine. I'll let you make the choice. It only takes one of us to do the spell, and I'm not the right person to choose. Do what you think is right." Harry stared after him.

That night before bed, he hugged both of his parents.

"I just wanted to say that I love you both," he said.

"And we love you too, Harry. Just like we always will." Now Harry lay staring at the ceiling. How could he give this up? What he'd always wanted was finally now. His dad had said they'd go to a Quidditch match tomorrow.

Maybe he could do it the next day? But Harry knew, in his heart, that if he put it off now, he'd never do it.

Maybe he should ask his parents. After all, it involved them too. But they'd made their choice, that night that Harry got his scar. He knew what they'd want him to do. Stiffened with a sudden resolve, he climbed from his bed and pulled the spellbook out from under it. He read the spell. It was very simple, but he saw why Ron couldn't do it. It was of a curious type, where great power could be wielded with a simple spell, but only if the caster was willing to give up something very precious to him. Harry realized that if he once said these words, he'd never again be with his parents.

"Orderus Restorimi, Sacraficio Argelfraster" he read slowly. The room

spun around him, he fell backward, and all was dark.

"Get up, you lazy boy!" a screech came from outside his door. Harry looked up. There was Aunt Petunia. She was red with fury.

"That's the third time I called you this morning! Are you going to get up?" She vanished. Harry looked about him. Had it all been a dream? As if in reply, a bedraggled owl flew in the window.

"Errol!" Harry called. It collapsed. Harry rushed over and pulled the letter off its leg. It was from Ron.

Dear Harry,

—

I'm sorry for what I said when we last met. I think I overreacted. I know it must have been very hard for you. But I think you made the right choice.

—

This is something, a souvenir of our trip, I think.

—

Ron

Harry looked at the second item that had been in the envelope.

It was a wizard photograph. It was of Harry " standing with his parents! How it had come back with them was a mystery, but there it was. Harry looked at it. The loss of his parents still ached within him, when he saw what could have been. But, well—that was one magic spell. Perhaps there'd be another someday that could help hi see his family again?

And he couldn't worry about that now., From the noise downstairs, he was in for a bad day unless he got a move on soon.

Oh, well, only two months until school started.

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